

Charles Colson's Conversion

Pastor Joseph Clark – May 12, 2020

“But all at once I realized that it was not my success God had used to enable me to help those in this prison, or in hundreds of others just like it. My life of success was not what made this morning so glorious -all my achievements meant nothing in God's economy...No, the real legacy of my life was my biggest failure- that I was an ex-convict. My greatest humiliation -being sent to prison- was the beginning of God's greatest use of my life; He chose the one thing in which I could not glory for His glory.”

- Charles Colson, Former White House Counsel, Founder of Prison Fellowship.

“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

- The Apostle Paul, Romans Chapter 11 verse 29

More popularly known as “Chuck” Colson, Charles Wendell Colson served as special counsel to President Richard Nixon from 1969 to 1970. He was a hardcore atheist. He pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice for his participation in the Watergate Scandal. He grew up in Boston and attended Brown University where he earned an AB with honors and his J.D., with honors from George Washington University Law School. He was married twice and fathered three children. He was a Captain in the Marine Corp. He served as Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He formed a law firm in 1961 and left it in 1969 to join the Nixon Administration. During his time with the Nixon Administration he had a reputation of being unsympathetic and hardcore in his thinking and position on social issues both foreign and domestic. He once proposed firebombing The Brookings's Institute (a social issues think tank organization) in order to steal politically damaging documents while firefighters put the blaze out. He was once quoted as saying “I'd walk over my own grandmother to re-elect Richard Nixon.”

On March 1, 1974, Colson was indicted for conspiring to cover up the Watergate burglaries. As he was facing arrest, a close friend gave him a copy of C.S Lewis's ‘Mere Christianity.’ Colson read it and soon joined prayer groups and became an

Evangelical Christian. Once described by the press as Nixon's "Evil Genius" and "Dirty Tricks Man," Colson changed his plea to guilty and served 7 months in prison. During his time in prison, Colson witnessed injustices done to prisoners and shortcomings in rehabilitation. He was called by God to create a prison reform ministry. He founded the Prison Fellowship which is now "the nation's largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families." He dedicated his time acting as a Christian advocate, in which he was published, interviewed, quoted, and listened to as a keynote speaker. Over the remainder of his life he was awarded multiple honorary doctorates, civic awards, and the Presidential Citizens Medal. Colson authored and co-authored over 30 books on faith in Christ, Evangelism, and conversion, which have sold more than 5 million copies.

He went to be with the Lord on April 18, 2012.

Recently, as I was preparing to lead a church service, a local resident walked into the chapel, and informed me that she would not attend my church as there was nobody playing piano during the hymns and that it did not 'feel' like church without a piano player. I attempted to reassure her telling her. "We sing lots of hymns during our worship, accompanied by a CD player." "No piano player. No church." She replied indignantly and she walked out of the chapel.

I had a member of my family tell me that they struggle with their faith because of all the wrong doings of the "church." I have heard others say that they will not go to church as there is no church of their denomination in that town so they would rather not attend a church period.

What does all of this have to do with your relationship with God?

We do not go to church to please a Pope or a Bishop. We do not go to church to please a priest or a minister. We do not go to meet the expectations of members of a congregation. If you look hard enough you will not run out of reasons to justify not going to church. That is exactly what the enemy is hoping you will do. We go to church for the glory of God.

Are you part of the solution or part off the problem?

Is the kingdom of God stronger or weaker if you do not go to church?

When I am providing pastoral care to my brothers and sisters in Christ, I hear some very emotional and often disturbing things. I witness happenings and people

which really grab my heart: A homeless man in the park who was 60 and began to cry as he described that he was unable to provide shelter and a living for both himself and his 30 year-old special needs son.

A senior lady, paralyzed from the neck down who was unable to speak. She spends her days staring off into the distance almost catatonic, but when I sing hymns to her, she sings them back with the most angelic voice.

A lady stricken with dementia to the extent that she can hardly utter an intelligible word, but when she sees the cross hanging around my neck, she points to it and says very clearly “I love you.”

When I am ministering to the congregant, I am strong and supportive. I am peaceful and reassuring. I exude confidence in God and demonstrate strength through faith. But later, when I am recollecting these sad stories to my significant other, I break down in tears. I never cry in front of those I am ministering to while I assure them that they are forgiven, that God is with them, that they are blessed in their suffering. The Holy Spirit strengthens me and works through me. But later, the Lord lets me shed the burden of the palpable sadness, and cry on a loved one’s shoulder. The Lord blesses me to use what small talents or skills I have, to be an asset to his kingdom. In my past life prior to being saved, I produced film and television, I hosted and produced a radio program, and I authored books. In addition to my traditional face-to-face ministry, I now produced a weekly Christian podcast, a weekly Gospel video, and a weekly written article. God blessed me with these talents, and I intend to use them to be an asset to His kingdom. I am a sinner. I can be impatient with people. I can be judgemental at times. I can gossip if I am not careful. While I am an asset to Christ’s kingdom when I use my talents to minister, I am a liability to his kingdom when I sin. What a sobering thought.

Charles Colson had talents and skills which he used for destructive means. But when he was saved, he recognized how he could use those talents to create an effective and inspiring ministry. This faith was strong and while he was imprisoned, he was called by God to minister to inmates. In his own words:

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified, they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed

that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world -and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

“It is not what we do that matters, but what a sovereign God chooses to do through us. God doesn't want our success; He wants us. He doesn't demand our achievements; He demands our obedience. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of paradox, where through the ugly defeat of a cross, a holy God is utterly glorified. Victory comes through defeat; healing through brokenness; finding self through losing self.”

“It is a huge mistake to become married to an ideology, because the greatest enemy of the gospel is ideology. Ideology is a man-made format of how the world ought to work, and Christians instead believed in the revealing truth Scripture.”

“When God wanted to defeat sin, His ultimate weapon was the sacrifice of His own Son. On Christmas Day two thousand years ago, the birth of a tiny baby in an obscure village in the Middle East was God's supreme triumph of good over evil.”

“The Bible: banned, burned, beloved. More widely read, more frequently attacked than any other book in history. Generations of intellectuals have attempted to discredit it; dictators of every age have outlawed it and executed those who read it. Yet soldiers carry it into battle believing it is more powerful than their weapons. Fragments of it smuggled into solitary prison cells have transformed ruthless killers into gentle saints. Pieced-together scraps of Scripture have converted whole villages of pagan Indians.”

“Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study, and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality. It is a worldview.”

El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty) gave us the gift of individual talents for a reason. When we have the privilege to be called by our divine and all-powerful God to utilize those talents in His service, we must do so without hesitation. He calls us quite often at moments when we are at our worst or we have hit rock bottom. And

when called we springboard back. By his wisdom and brilliance we are redeemed and we must obediently respond to his commission.

The Holy Spirit tells us in the word:

We're called to use our gifts to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace. (1Peter 4:10)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Praise God! Praise him on our knees! Our every word, our every thought, our every act! Praise Him through capitalizing on your talents in His service. Let us pray for those whose potential for the kingdom of God is yet to be recognized, that they hear and respond to the call of our magnificent Father in Heaven and that their greatest failure becomes the turning point to God's greatest success in them.